

## NAMING THE APPLGATE TRAIL

There is some confusion about the name of what we now call “The Applegate Trail”. This name is not found on the oldest survey maps made by the Government Land Office (GLO) 1855-1856. Therefore, can remnants found today actually be called, the Applegate Trail?

In 1846, the Oregon Provisional Legislature appointed the Applegate’s and others to attempt to find a more southerly route to Oregon. The South Road Expedition began the task on Jun 22, 1846. The fifteen persons involved were Jesse Applegate, Lindsay Applegate, Levi Scott, David Goff, John M Scott, John (Jack) Jones, Robert Smith, John Owens, William Sportsman, Samuel H. Goodhue, Moses Harris, William G. Parker, Benj. (or Bennett) Osborne, Benjamin F (Birch or Burch), and Henry Boygus (Bogus or Boggs). This new ‘road’ was called, “The South Road from the Willamette Valley”. (Davis, Charles Scott: *The South Road: and the Route Across Southern Oregon*, 2000, Emigrants West)

Less than 4 months later, Virgil Pringle recorded his wagon crossing the Rogue River - Illinois Valley Road - Ford, October 16, 1846.

### The Military Road

In 1853-1854, Major Alvord surveyed the Military Road from Myrtle Creek to Camp Stewart. Alvord’s actual map has not been located, but in his notes he called the road: The Road to Jacksonville and The Road to Illinois Valley via VanNoys’ Ferry. The closest old primary sources we could find with a connection to the name “Applegate” was the U.S. Army, Topographical Engineers, identifying the “Applegate-Alvord Survey of Camp Stuart-Myrtle Creek Route in 1853.

Other old primary source names are: “Route of John Withers, Survey of Myrtle Creek-Scottsburg Route and “Oregon-California Stage Route”. In 1854 the *Oregon Statesman* newspaper referred to the Territorial Road.

“*Military Roads in Southern Oregon*”, map prepared by Charles F. Strong of the Topographical Engineers, U.S. Army, identified two military roads and one stage route in Southern Oregon (*Wagon Roads West*, p.74). The map, although drafted in 1949, represents the historical period of 1853-1854 when supplies to the gold fields of southern Oregon and northern California arrived from the Pacific Ports at Scottsburg, Oregon and Crescent City, California.

### Government Land Office (GLO) Maps

In 1855-1856 the GLO made the first surveyed map of the “Applegate Trail”. The surveyors seemed to use the most logical names identifying roads by who traveled the road (Immigrants) or the destination of the road (Road from Willamette Valley to Jacksonville). On their maps we find the following names: Starting at the top of the Siskiyou near the Green Springs area and traveling to Mt. Sexton:

Name	Location	Township & Section
Old Immigrant Road	East of Green Springs	T 39S R 5E
Southern OR Wagon Road	Links to Jacksonville	T 39S R 5E
Road from Jacksonville	Links to Southern OR Wagon Rd	T 39S R4E
Immigrant Road	East of Ashland	T 40S R 3E
Immigrant Road	SE of Ashland	T 40S R 2E
Immigrant Road	Descending to Ashland	T 39S R 2E
Immigrant Creek	Descending to Ashland	T 39S R 2E
Stage Road to Yreka	Links S to California	T 39S R 2E
Rd to Crescent City via Illinois Valley	Grants Pass	T 36S R 5W
Gold River	Rogue River	T 36S R 5W
Rd from Canyon Cr. to VanNoys' Ferry	Mt. Sexton	T 36S R 6W
Trail to Gullease Creek Mines	Rogue River	T 36S R 6W
Rd to Illinois Valley to Crescent City	Ft VanNoy area	T 36S R 6W
Rd from Willamette Valley to Jacksonville	Mt. Sexton	T 34S R 6W
Rd to Illinois Valley & VanNoys' Ferry	Mt. Sexton	T 35S R 6W
Rd to Illinois Valley	Mt. Sexton	T 34S R 6W

William Emerson, author of *"The Applegate Trail of 1846, A Documentary Guide to the Original Southern Emigrant Route to Oregon"*, published in 1996, lists 27 "Other Trail Names for the original Southern Emigrant Route to Oregon".

"the Applegate Trail"  
 "Southern Immigrant Road"  
 "The 'Southern' Route"  
 "Scott's and Applegate's Old South Road"  
 "Southe Immigrant Road"  
 "The Applegate Trail: 1847-1883 The Southern Route"  
 "the Applegate Cut-off"  
 "the Applegate route"  
 "cut-off of Applegate's"  
 "Applegate Road"  
 "The Southern Rout to Oregon"  
 "The Southern Rout from the United States to Oregon"  
 "Applegate Trail"  
 "Applegate Cut-off"  
 "Applegate Route"  
 "Applegate Road"  
 "the southern route"  
 "Scout-Applegate Trail"  
 "California-Oregon Trail"  
 "The old '46 wagon road"  
 "Southern Pass"  
 "The Southern Route Into Oregon"

“The Applegate Route”  
“The new Southern Road”  
“the Applegate Trail, Cut –off, Route, Road”  
“a new route”  
“the southern route to Oregon”

#### The Evolution of Trails

It was common that immigrant trails closely followed earlier trails. Indian foot trails - 1 foot wide, to horse and rider trails - 2 feet wide, to pack horse trail - 3 feet wide, to wagon trail – 5 feet wide, and finally to Stage Road – 7 feet wide. It is physically easier to widen an established horse trail of 3 feet to a wagon road of 5 feet than to clear brush and trees forming an entirely new road unless rerouting was necessary because of obstacles, avoiding mud, creating a shorter route, or through hilly or mountain terrain.

Military roads were engineered taking more time to build and were created to handle supply wagons and stage coaches. They were excavated on hillsides and contoured to the slope. In mountain passes such as Mt. Sexton where all trails/roads crossed the low point of the pass in approximately the same location, these historical routes became stacked one upon the other right up to the current modern highway – I 5.

So naming the Applegate Trail began in 1846 when traveler Jesse Quinn Thornton called it “That Demandable Applegate Trail”. But following surveyors and road builders called the road by many other names all logically selected. It officially became the Applegate Trail in 1946 the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the trail. But throughout history the name Applegate Trail has been the accepted and the most popular name that endured. However, Charles George Davis, as late as 1995 titled his book, “*Scott-Applegate Trail 1846-1847, Atlas & Gazetteer*”. Is the debate over yet?

Renee L. Ford  
GLO Field Survey Sub-Committee  
Hugo Emigrant Trails Committee  
PO Box 81  
Merlin, OR 97532  
[jrford@dishmail.net](mailto:jrford@dishmail.net)  
541-471-1235